

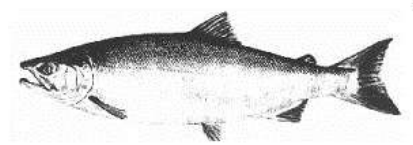
# **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

## **DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES**

### **NEWS RELEASE**



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## **2012 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Kotzebue Sound commercial salmon fishery opened on July 10 and closed after the August 31 fishing period. Similar to last year there was a very strong run of chum salmon, but commercial fishing was limited, particularly in August, because of buyer capacity limitations and extreme weather conditions.

During most of July there was sufficient buyer capacity for the fleet to fish six days a week, but there were some closures because of runway work preventing cargo planes being able to land at Kotzebue airport. During the second half of the first week of August fishing was reduced to three to four hours from the usual eight hours in length because of buyer capacity limitations. During the last half of August daily fishing periods were extended to six hours, but fishing effort dropped off because of poor weather.

There were 83 permit holders who sold fish to the major buyer, Great Pacific Seafoods, including one catcher-seller who sold fish to Great Pacific as well as to a second buyer Sun'aq Tribal Enterprises, Inc. and also to Kotzebue area residents. The 83 permit holders were the second largest number of permits fished in Kotzebue since 1995 and were slightly behind last year's total of 89 permit holders that fished (Figure 1 and Table 1). The price per pound for chum salmon dropped from \$0.40/lb last year to \$0.32/lb and may have been a factor in the number of permit holders fishing this season.

In the Kotzebue fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Fishermen generally operate with one end on or near shore and with all three shackles connected. Fishermen also set in deeper channels in the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-7/8 inch or 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

The overall chum salmon run to Kotzebue Sound in 2012 was estimated to be above average to well above average based on the commercial harvest rates, subsistence fishermen reporting good catches, and the Kobuk test fish index being the third highest in the 20 year project history. No aerial surveys were flown in the Kobuk and Noatak River drainages, because of high and turbid

water. The commercial harvest of 227,965 chum salmon was the fourth highest in 20 years. Also, harvested during the commercial fishery and kept for personal use were 7 Chinook salmon, 6 sockeye salmon, 445 pink salmon, 18 coho salmon, 300 Dolly Varden, 1,867 sheefish, 27 whitefish, 1 tom cod and 2 pike. There were likely some additional fish kept for personal use that did not get reported on fish tickets.

A total of 1,751,473 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 7.7 lbs) were sold at an average of \$0.32 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$567,664 to Kotzebue Sound fishermen. The average value for each participating permit holder was \$6,839. The total exvessel value represents 96% of the \$592,450 historical average (Table 1).

### SEASON NARRATIVE

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement through the commercial fishery to ensure a sustained run and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index.

Beginning on July 10 the season was opened to commercial fishing. The schedule was set from 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. daily during first week and second week of fishing. Beginning the third week, the time was shifted to 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. because of higher catch volume resulting in buyer capacity concerns. Throughout the season there was a closure from the end of the Saturday morning period until Sunday evening. This was the second year of evening fishing hours. Although last year the evening fishing hours were in response to the nightly runway closures at the airport, the major buyer decided to stay with the evening fishing hours. The buyer noted that last years evening fishing hours improved operations and fishing effort had increased from previous years when fishing periods were during the day. The one major buyer was Great Pacific Seafoods who bought from all permit holders and there was one minor buyer, Sun'aq Tribal Enterprises Inc. that purchased salmon from one permit holder for a value added market. The weekly fishing periods for the minor buyer were set during day so as to not conflict with fishing efforts during the evening hours.

Strong commercial and test fish catches in July indicated a very large chum salmon run and the department continued to open fishing any time either buyer requested. Beginning in August catch volume started to increase and the major buyer needed to shorten fishing hours. During the second half of August, severe weather limited the time the fleet was able to fish.

The biggest daily catch was on August 2 when 32,704 chum salmon were sold during an 8-hour opening. This one-day catch was the largest catch in nearly 20 years. For the next week fishing time was reduced to three or four hours daily. Fishing effort peaked during the first and second week of August with four days where over 50 permit holders fished. The highest daily effort was August 2 when 54 permit holders fished. Beginning with the August 15 fishing period, severe weather developed and fishing effort dropped to 8 permits holders from the previous day's effort of 42 and the catch dropped to 1,083 chum salmon compared to previous days catch of 10,495 chum salmon. A combination of heavy seas tended to keep permit holders close to shore and the last two weeks of the season there was only one fishing period where catches were over 1,000 chum salmon. The season total harvest of 227,965 trailed last year's catch of 270,343 chum salmon, but was still the fourth highest in 20 years.

Age, sex and length composition (ASL) was taken from commercial catch samples, but was not used to manage the fishery. The majority of the chum salmon each year are usually four- and five-year-old fish. In 2012, commercial catch samples were 2% age-0.2 fish, 70% age-0.3 fish, and 24% age-0.4 fish and 4% age-0.5 fish. Historical comparisons had the catch samples falling within the range of previous years.

### **ESCAPEMENT**

This year's test fish chum salmon CPUE cumulative index at the department test fish project on the Kobuk River near Kiana was 2,398 points and ranked third out of 20 years. Likely the project would have finished with the highest CPUE, but test fishing operations were suspended a week early because of high water and uprooted trees and other debris floating down the river making test fishing impossible.

The Kobuk River test net catch samples were (< 1%) age-0.2 fish, 62% age-0.3 fish, 34% age-0.4 fish and 3% age-0.5 fish. Historical comparisons show the catch samples falling within the range of previous years.

High and turbid water prevented aerial surveys of the Kobuk River and Noatak River drainages.

### **SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY**

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. No other information on subsistence harvest is available other than comments that chum salmon fishing on the Kobuk River and Noatak River was good.

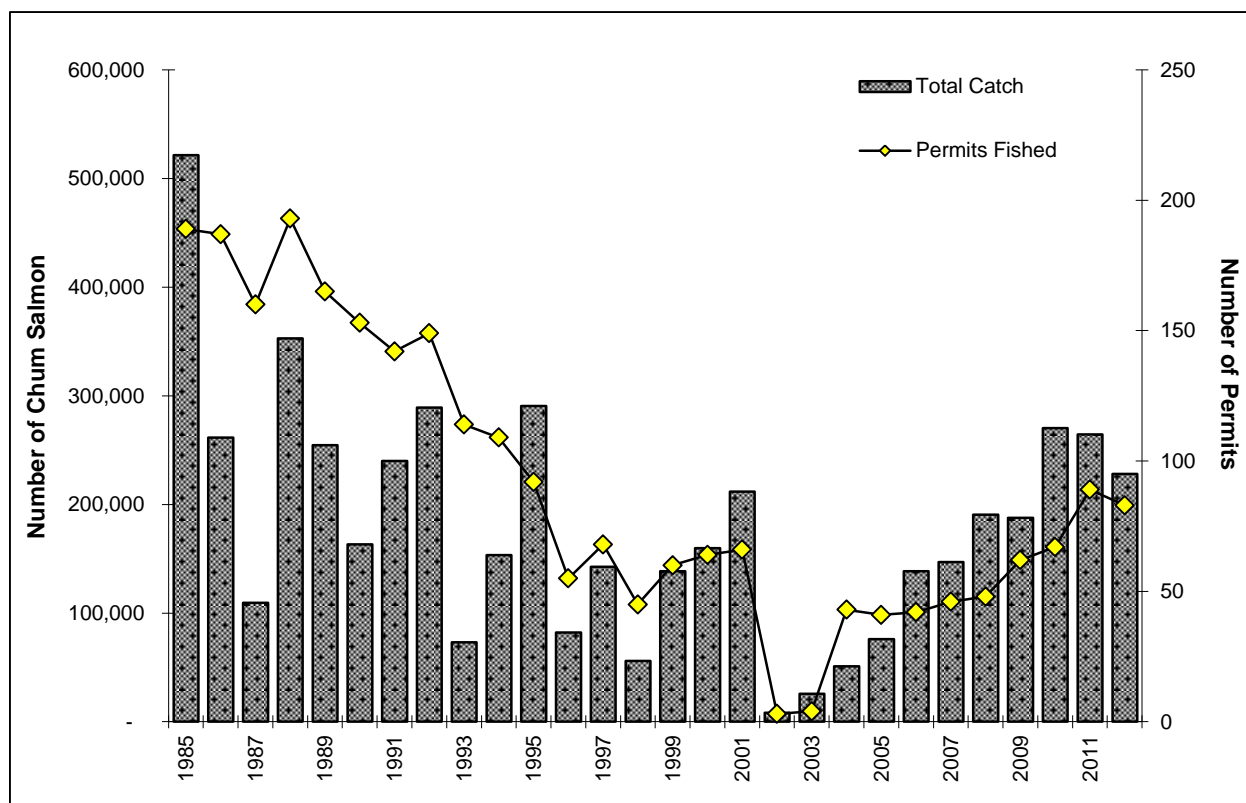


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1985–2012.

Table 1.—Kotzebue District Chum Salmon Catch and Dollar Value, 1962-2012.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 <sup>c</sup>	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
Average	198,559	111	1,972	\$592,450
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664

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Table 1. Page 2 of 2.

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- <sup>a</sup> During 1962–1966 and 1968–1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of fishermen.
- <sup>b</sup> Some estimates between 1962 and 1981 include only chum value which in figures represent over 99% of the total value. Figures after 1981 represent the chum value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish and other salmon.
- <sup>c</sup> Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.